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Writing an action research thesis:
One researcher's resolution of the problematic of form and process

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Abstract

I have recently been involved in a five-year action research project in a Queensland primary school. I initially developed a format for the thesis and commenced the task of writing up the study, based on the accepted sequence, and academic norm, of literature review, methodology, research design, findings and conclusions. However, the cyclical and evolving nature of action research meant that new areas of literature were constantly added to the research process, new data kept on being generated, and new meanings and additional lines of inquiry were regularly suggested. These shifts and changes complicated the conduct of the research and made the process of writing a report particularly challenging. After much anxiety and considerable experimentation, I resolved the problem of 'fit' between action research and the traditional thesis format by creating an alternative structure which better reflects the nature of the study. This paper outlines this alternative and discusses its purpose.

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Introduction

Environmental education is a field that straddles both science and the social sciences, with scientific discourses arguably having had the stronger influence. This position has shaped the philosophical foundations of environmental education, the types of research undertaken, and how these have been represented. Recently, the social sciences have become more powerful in environmental education, broadening the philosophical and theoretical underpinnings of the field, widening the research approaches and leading, generally, to greater problematisation and diversification of issues about the conduct of research and how it can be reported. Nevertheless, scientific models and approaches to research continue to have considerable influence. In this paper I discuss how I dealt with these paradigmatic tensions, specifically in relation to how I chose to structure and report my doctoral research – a five-year action research study in a Queensland primary school. The overall purpose of the study was to develop a whole school curriculum based on the concept of learnscaping, where the school's grounds and gardens would become the vehicle for environmental education in the school, as well as providing the springboard for a wide range of integrated curriculum studies.

Because I was doing action research– an opportunistic, 'boots and all' research approach – I began my field work simultaneously with my PhD enrolment, unlike most standard approaches to commencing doctoral research. This meant that I was in the field, building relationships, collecting and analysing data, devising research actions – at the same time as I was reading literature, learning about methodology and trying to find some structure to the overall research process. Furthermore, I conceived of the research as an investigative journey having two distinct, but intertwined phases: the action research fieldwork component, conducted collaboratively, for creating the learnscaping curriculum; and a phase of analysis and reflection based on the emerging findings, where I developed my personal "living educational theory" about change and innovation.

Initially, I was very involved in the school based project and directed my energies towards getting the collaborative project underway. When eventually I came to structure the thesis and formally report on the study, I anticipated that I would follow the academic norm of a

writing a report with the standard sequence of separate chapters for introduction, literature review, methodology, research design, findings and conclusions. Consequently, I drafted an initial overview chapter, a first draft of my literature review chapter, and a draft methodology chapter. However, this format proved to be unsatisfactory when I attempted to write about the research design. At this point I knew I had a problem with the conventional structure because the research was not really designed at all – it evolved – and was still in the process of evolution. I knew I must begin to write about the research process at this point because of the large volumes of data I had already accumulated and was afraid of being overwhelmed if this was left any later, but what I wanted to write about was still unfolding. The research wasn't 'over'; data were still being collected, transcribed and analysed; new literature was being examined; and interpretations were continuing to be crystallized in the light of both the field experience and the literature. I discovered what Richardson articulates; that writing, like acquiring data, is also a 'way of knowing' (2000, p. 923), a method of discovery and analysis, and that form and content are inseparable.

The 'standard' format and approach to writing

Richardson asserts that the standard approach to writing in social science research has been a linear, static writing model that "coheres with mechanistic scientism and quantitative research" (Richardson, 2000, p. 924). This, she states, has grown from the 17th century binary division between literature and science and, until very recently, has maintained its dominance in doctoral reportage, regardless of the field of research. This is an approach where the writer has been discouraged from writing until they knew what they wanted to say, that is, until key points were organised and outlined. Richardson continues:

> The model has serious problems: it ignores the role of writing as a dynamic, creative process; it undermines the confidence of beginning qualitative researchers because their experience of research is inconsistent with the writing model; and it contributes to the flotilla of qualitative writing that is simply not interesting to read because adherence to the model requires writers to silence their own voices and to view themselves as contaminants. (p. 925)

As Winter (1996) suggests, this approach is just "one *possible* format, *one* way of structuring and transforming experience to bring out its significance" (p. 25-26). Writers of reports based on action research projects, in particular, he claims, should not be overawed by the cultural authority of the scientific expert and should resist the scientific format and rhetoric of reporting research.

How Action Research Challenges Linear Report Writing

To explain why conventional reportage poses problems for action research report writing, in particular, it is necessary to elucidate about action research itself. As the name suggests, action research is a method with the dual aims of action and research with the creation of change being the fundamental intention. For many, the image of a spiral consisting of continuous and overlapping cycles of self-reflection (planning, acting, observing, reflecting and critical analysis) represents the key characteristic of action research (Kemmis, 2001; Winter, 1996). Dick (2000) considers that the pursuit of both action and research and the spiral process are the defining characteristics of action research.

Action research is a cyclical process in two ways. First, it is a series of activities within a cycle – an iteration – and, second, it is a series of cycles. Hence, it is ongoing and constituted by a flow of interrelated events over time. It starts with reflection on current actions, including *inactions*, and proceeds to new actions which are, themselves, researched. What results is a continuous spiral with each cycle leading through to the next (Wadsworth, 1998). Action research is clearly not a linear methodology.

The process, however, is not as neat as suggested as stages overlap, and initial plans can become obsolete or altered in the light of learning from experience. As Kemmis (2001) writes:

> In reality, the process is likely to be more fluid, open, and responsive. The criterion of success is not whether participants have followed the steps faithfully, but whether they have a strong and authentic sense of development and evolution in their practices, their understandings of their practices, and the situations in which they practice. (p. 595)

Carson (1990) considers that there are two central ideas that distinguish action research from other types of research. The first is that it is underpinned by the belief "that we may develop our understandings while at the same time bringing about changes in concrete situations" (p. 167). Second, because action research intends to draw together research and practice, it runs counter to other research traditions which view these as separate activities.

Carr and Kemmis (1986) and Kemmis and McTaggart (2000) reinforce this idea of the centrality of change through research. They note that, unlike other forms of research which set out to describe or to understand some aspect or problem, action research also sets out to change, for the better, a situation in the direction of greater "emancipation". As Kemmis

and McTaggart (2000) write, this kind of 'critical' action research derived from critical theory aims to:

> …help people recover, and release themselves, from the constraints of irrational, unproductive, unjust and unsatisfying *social structures* that limit their self-development and self-determination….[It] is a social process in which people deliberately set out to contest and to reconstitute irrational, unproductive (or inefficient) unjust, and/or unsatisfying (alienating) ways of interpreting and describing their world (language/discourses), ways of working (work), and ways of relaying to others (power). (p. 597-8)

Wadsworth (1998) also focuses on this aspect of embedded change through action research, stating that action research "is not just research which we hope will be followed by action! It is action which is researched, changed and re-researched, within the research process by participants" (p. 9). Change, then, is not an additional benefit of action research – it is fundamental to it. Action researchers have the goal of facilitating beneficial change "by critically reflecting on the historical, political, cultural, economic, geographic and other contexts which make sense of it" (Wadsworth, 1998, p.13). Furthermore, change does not just happen at "the end". It happens throughout, with a hallmark of the process being that it may change shape and focus over time, even unexpectedly, as participants focus and refocus their understandings about what is happening and what is important to them.

Critical reflection is another distinguishing feature of critical action research. As a spiral consisting of continuous and overlapping cycles, the completion of one cycle becomes the beginning of the next, with each cycle involving the interrelated steps of planning, implementation, observing, reflection and critical analysis. Grundy (1986) describes the reflective "moment", or phase, as looking back to previous action through methods of observation which "freeze" practice so that it can be recollected, analysed and judged at a later time. Reflection also looks forward to future action through the moment of planning, while action is retrospectively informed by reflection through planning. Thus, as Tripp (1990) comments about action research it:

> …consciously and deliberately uses the action research cycle, leading to "strategic action", which involves action based on quality information, in contrast to that which is a result of habit, instinct, opinion, or mere whim on the one hand, and irrelevant, subjective, and incomplete knowledge on the other. (p. 159)

Action research is also an imprecise form of inquiry. Action researchers know, more or less, where the research is coming from and where it is going to, but do not know precisely where it is going to end up or what the new situation will be like. However, it "does not

consider this to be an embarrassment" (Wadsworth, 1998, p. 6). The legitimacy of action research as an inexact process and one where the outcomes are liable to change is also affirmed by Winter (1998). He emphasises that the generation of knowledge, defined and determined by the participants and context of an inquiry, inevitably "entails an assumption that once the inquiry is underway and once one begins to learn from the first phases of the work, [that] the focus and the scope of the inquiry are likely to change (p. 63). For a conventional inquiry this would be highly regrettable, because it equates with "starting again", however, this is not the case in action research. As Winter stresses:

> The progress of one's inquiry over time – noting what happens as different things occur, as the situation develops: all this is essential to the learning process….For the focus of an action research project to shift is by no means… a defect of the original plan: it can be a positive indication of innovative, creative thinking. (p. 63-64)

Action research, then, is an evolutionary research process well suited to environments in transition or where there is a desire to explicitly bring about change.

The Two forms of Action Research in this Study

As mentioned earlier, in this study I used two contrasting, but complementary, forms of action research: a collaborative, school-based project, and a more solitary, reflective research process. The difference between the two, state Leitch and Day (2000), "remains their respective starting points – within one, *the system*, within the other, *the individual*" (p. 185). Thus, my thesis became the story of these two interconnected and overlapping research processes.

The first, undertaken in collaboration with research partners exploring curriculum and pedagogical practices in a school was typical of action research in the emancipatory, or critical paradigm. This involves researchers working within a self-critical community with co-researchers, committed to transforming "the system" in line with rational and democratic principles. The other form of action research used was my personal inquiry of critical reflection, change and thesis writing that initially was quite invisible within the structure of the thesis. These two forms are explained here in more detail.

1. Collaborative Action Research

Action research, as well as consciously intending change and being based on critically reflective processes, is also generally construed as a deliberately social process. This is because it focuses on practices and understandings where meaning is understood only through the social processes of language and social situations. Thus, the critical action researcher deliberately seeks to involve others in all phases of the research process. This represents a major conceptual shift in terms of the ownership of the research process, whereby "insiders" in the setting are also participants directly engaged in all phases of the research. As both Heron and Reason (2001) and Reason and Bradbury (2001a) state, "outsider" researchers may interpret or inform the practices that are being researched, but they do not form them, have limited power to transform them, and rarely live with the consequences of any transformations that occur. Participants involved in action research, by contrast, are deeply involved in all aspects of the research process – from creative thinking about what goes into the endeavour, to decision-making and contributing to the action which is the subject of the research. Baldwin (2001) highlights this with the following comments:

> Relationship is fundamental to the creation of reality, and a [method] that separates the researcher from the researched denies that relationship. Ontologically, such a process would invalidate knowledge created, because it would not construct a reality that has meaning for the subjects of the research. (p. 289)

Thus, critical, collaborative action research is not about "extracting secrets" from a group of research "subjects" but about the full involvement of participants in the decision-making and in their having ownership of the research process as well as the outcomes of the research (Robottom & Hart, 1993, p. 65).

2. 'Living Theory' Action Research

This study also utilised a more personal form of action research, encapsulated in the work of Whitehead (1989) who developed a concept called "living educational theory", a personal process of change and reflection. While the initial emphasis of Whitehead's approach is on individual introspective rather than collective action – the hallmark of critical/ emancipatory action research – this individual form of action research can also be seen as emancipatory. This is because it entails inquiry into the contradictions between the values held dear by practitioner-researchers but which may be negated or denied in practice. Whitehead suggests that exploration of questions such as "How do I improve my

practice?" and "How do I live my values more fully?" are fundamental for improving personal practice. As researchers become aware of the values that drive their work, they also become clearer about what they are doing and why. Through their personal inquiries around these questions, practitioner-researchers may construct, and reconstruct, their own living educational theory. Overall, this approach is not unlike "action inquiry" identified by Argyris and Schön (1974), and described later by Reason and Bradbury (2001b) as "first-person action research/practice", aimed at fostering an inquiry approach in a researcher's own life, and "bringing inquiry into more and more of our moments of action – not as outside researchers but in the whole range of everyday activities" (p. xxvi). As Whitehead (1989) comments, he has tried to direct attention to the living individuals and the contexts within which theory is produced.

This individual form of critical action research, as with collaborative approaches, is also cyclical. However, Whitehead (1989) suggests it "can be distinguished from other approaches in the tradition through its inclusion of "I" as a living contradiction within the presentation of a claim to educational knowledge" (p. 3). What emerges is a personal description and explanation of practice that become part of living practice. Accordingly, inquiry can involve a variety of means for self-reflection, including autobiography, dialogical conversations, stories, reflective writing and journals.

Modelled loosely on Whitehead's approach and the writings of Lomax (1994) and Marshall (2001) the development of my own living educational theory interweaves both forms of action research – the individual and the collaborative – into the single model presented in Figure 1. In this model the largely solo journey of learning, reflection and thesis writing also has its own "action" component, the collaborative action research project, which feeds back and validates or changes my living educational theory. It was this level of complexity built into the action research experiences in this study that forced me, ultimately, to seek a way that better reflected the nature of the research processes with which I was engaged.

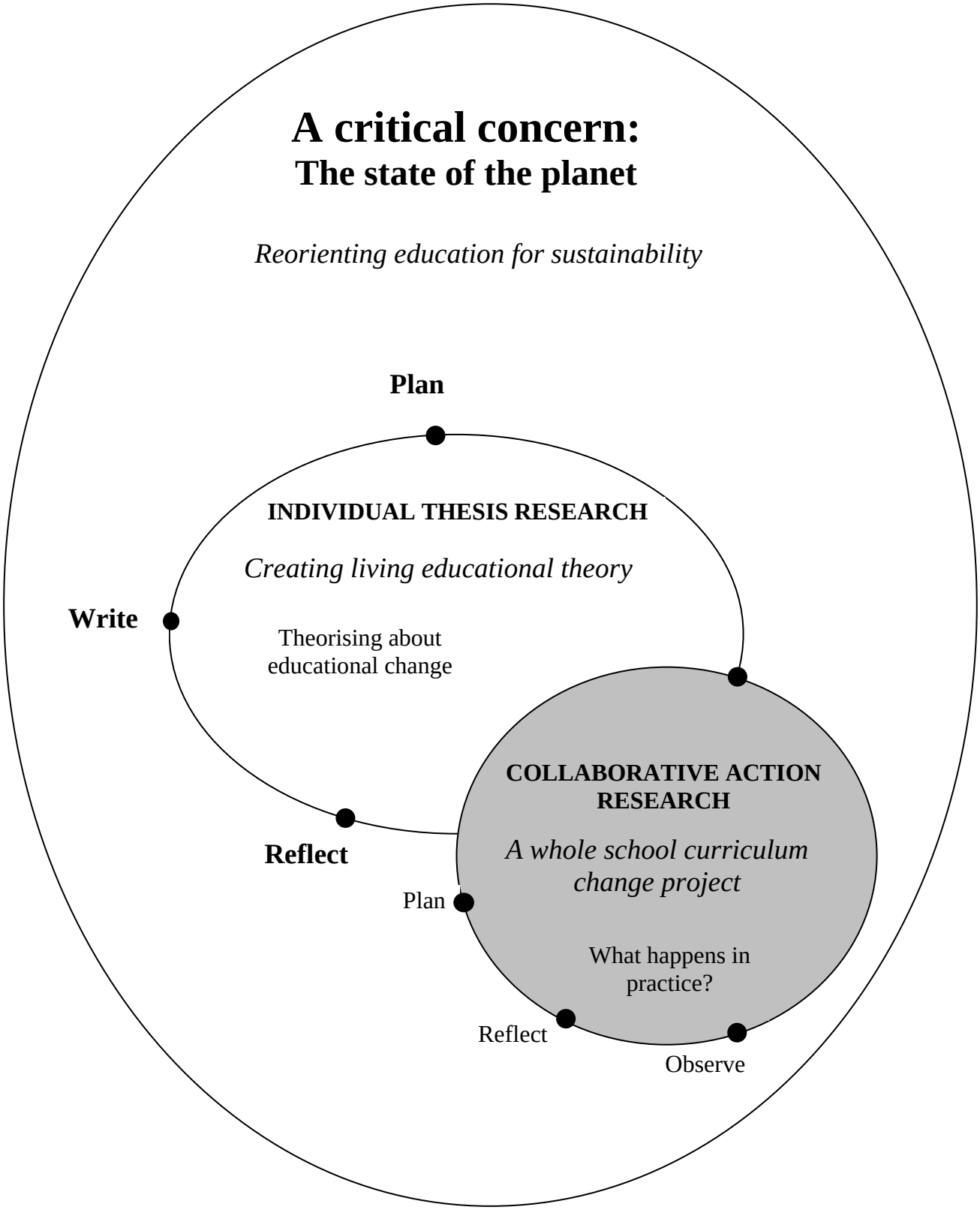

Figure 1. Model showing the relationships between my broad research interest, the collaborative action research and the individual thesis research.

The Action Research Report as Collage or Quilt

Since action research writing emerges from a particular set of relationships, mainly collaborative and action-oriented, Dick (1993) and Winter (1996) suggest that action research reports demand alternative ways of writing to account for the fact that action research is a continuously changing inquiry, with the understandings that are generated and the actions that are created always being provisional. Indeed, both the context and the research really have no end-state at all, and hence the thesis or report can only ever be a provisional and incomplete account of the research project (James, 1999). Accordingly, this calls into question the "academic norm" of presenting reports with the accepted sequence of separate chapters for literature review, methodology, research design, findings and conclusions. Winter prefers to think of the text of an action research report in pluralistic terms, suggesting it be more like a collage than a description, a view also supported Denzin and Lincoln (2000) who describe the "new" paradigm researcher as "bricoleur" or quiltmaker.

Thus, contemporary research is much more likely to involve the deployment of a wider range of interpretative/qualitative practices, aimed at understanding and "interrogating" the subject matter at hand, rather than presenting a highly structured and apparently methodical account of a research situation. Indeed, Denzin and Lincoln (2000) refer to the postmodern researcher more as a *bricoleur*, a maker of quilts or montage, a "Jack of all trades", a kind of professional do-it-yourself person. In this kind of research:

> The solution which is the result of the *bricoleur's* method is an [emergent] construction… if new tools or techniques have to be invented, or pieced together, then the researcher will do this. The choices as to which interpretative practices to employ are not necessarily set in advance. (p. 4)

Examples of montage or "quilt-making" are now beginning to appear in research texts. While the use of multiple voices, different textual formats and various typefaces[1], at first glance, may appear as "messy text", this should not be regarded as a typographical nightmare. Instead, Lincoln and Guba (2000) state, these texts:

> …seek to break the binary between science and literature, to portray the contradiction and truth of human experience, to break the rules [to show] how real humans cope with both the eternal verities of human existence and the daily irritations and tragedies of living that existence. Postmodern representations search out and experiment with narratives that

> expand the range of understanding, voice, and the storied variations in human experience. (p. 184)

They also comment that the combination of multiple methodological practices, empirical materials, perspectives and observers in a single study can add rigour, breadth, complexity, richness and depth to an inquiry. The *bricoleur* becomes adept at performing a large number of diverse tasks, ranging from interviewing to intensive self-reflection and introspection. As Denzin and Lincoln (2000) note, "the researcher-as-*bricoleur*-theorist works within and between competing and overlapping perspectives" (p. 6).

As I was looking for ways to overcome the difficulties of reporting action research, these contemporary perspectives began to influence the development of my research and thesis writing practices. Consequently, I became more flexible and adventurous than previously in relation to my own research theorising and practice, acknowledging that "no specific method or practice can be privileged over any other" (Denzin & Lincoln, 2000, p. 6). The "patchwork" that emerged in my study report reveals the "emerging confluences" in contemporary research practice (Lincoln & Guba, 2000) and is therefore more representative of the "post paradigmatic diaspora" that Atkinson et al. (1988) (cited in Lather, 1991) describe as exceeding and complicating the idea of distinct paradigms in research. Overall, I agree with the comments of Atkinson et al.:

> Classifying research and researchers into neatly segregated "paradigms" or "traditions" does not reflect the untidy realities of real scholars…and may become an end in itself…. "Traditions" must be treated not as clearly defined, real entities but only as loose frameworks for dividing research. (p. 108)

Lincoln (1997) proposes "portrayal" as a better term than "reportage" for describing the presentation of research emanating from "action" paradigms. This, she states, is "the ability to craft compelling narratives which give outsiders a vicarious experience of the community and which give insiders both a deeper understanding of themselves, and the power to act" (p. 23). Another suggestion is for action research to consist of various narrative accounts and their critiques, ending with questions and further possibilities, not conclusions, that are intended to be "convincing" (Elliott, 1994). Taking account of these views about report writing in action research, as well as being cognisant of emerging critiques of scientific writing in higher education thesis writing more generally (Conle, 2000; Richardson, 2000), I eventually arrived at an alternative format for writing about the

action cycles of this action research report. As Richardson (2000) writes, “There is no single way – much less one “right” way – of staging a text” (p. 936).

Creating a Narrative: An Alternative Textual Form

Taking into account the dilemmas faced initially in trying to write this research as a conventional thesis report when it surely was not going to fit the existing model, I needed to develop an alternative. Consequently, the concept of the action research report as a “critical narrative” emerged. According to Bruner (1986), cited in Hart (2002), narrative can help us understand reasons for our actions which are motivated by beliefs, desires, theories and values. Used particularly in critical ethnography, narrative suggests that research participants reassess their current understandings, relationships and practices through reading and writing that is insightful and engaging. This seemed to match my own research purposes.

Brodkey (1987) states that there are two parts to a critical narrative – description and critique. The description is essentially a narrative, whereas the critique is an interruption of the narrative to provide a “systematic, verbal protest against cultural hegemony” (p. 67). The “critiquing” aspects of critical narrative can provide valuable transformative tools that allow understanding of the world in new ways and help in the communication of new ideas (Gudmundsdottir, 1995). By contrast, she suggests, narrative refers to the structure, knowledge and skill required to construct a story. She also maintains that narrative and storytelling have become significant themes in educational research, and that it is through the telling of stories that one gets to know “pedagogical content knowledge”. Storytelling also helps in problem definition, report Goodson and Walker (1995) and offers “a kind of intermediate technology of research adapted to the study of practical problems in realistic timescales” (p. 187), a key characteristic of action research. In discussing the use of stories in action research specifically, Burchell and Dyson (2000) comment that narratives can provide insights for writers and readers by aiding reflection and assisting in the recognition and addressing of emerging issues and dilemmas. After taking these perspectives into account, narrative emerged as an important tool in this study, providing a powerful way of aiding reflection, understanding and communication of its processes and outcomes. The combination, then, of narrative and reportage as collage or quilting, led me to develop a new structure for my thesis that diverged from the more conventional format with which I had started.

Instead of separate, sequential chapters – literature review, followed by a report of research "findings", and then interpretations detached from accounts of the research process, I chose instead to highlight the interdependence of events, processes and outcomes of the research, through the intermingling of narrative, literature review, analysis, and critical reflection in each of the three central 'cycle' chapters. This is indicated in Figure 2, an example of this revised structure, taken from the Table of Contents of the thesis.

Figure 2: Example of Non-Linear Chapter Structure

The Role of Literature in Action Research

It is necessary at this point, because of its fundamental impact on the final configuration of the thesis, to articulate the special role that literature review has in action research. Literature review is not a separate process from data analysis and interpretation. Like (Conle, 2000), I did not commence this doctoral research process with a review of literature, beginning instead with the 'action' of the collaborative project in the school. Literature, though, was accessed more or less continuously throughout the whole of the research process, often not known until data collection and interpretation are under way. This provokes the researcher to pursue particular lines of literature inquiry in response to the queries and questions thrown up during analysis, or the desire to search for confirming

or disconfirming views about what the data is suggesting (Dick, 1993). Indeed, Dick suggests that the search for disconfirming evidence and argument in the literature, at the time that the researcher is making tentative interpretations, actually helps the researcher to reach conclusions with more confidence, which results in actions being better informed. Winter (1998) refers to this process as "dialectical analysis" and of "being theoretical" (p. 67) about the data, contemplating it, speculating about it and placing it in a wider context. This is much like the process described by (Richardson, 2000) as 'crystallization' which challenges traditional notions of validity and truth in research, and instead, "provides us with a deepened, complex, thoroughly partial, understanding of the topic" [where] paradoxically, we know more and doubt what we know (p. 934)". This process of generating interpretations, ideas and actions derived from both the evidence and from the literature was a major research strategy used throughout the life of this study.

I sought, therefore, to express this process by placing multiple literature reviews throughout the thesis, rather than presenting a complete literature review at the beginning of the report. This was done to try to mirror the reflexive nature of action research in which understandings developed from both literature and practice help generate actions, and vice versa. Therefore, as well as an initial literature review in chapter 2 that outlined my concerns about global environmental issues and the role of education for sustainability, each of the chapters based on the three action research cycles also contains its own review of literature. Each cycle chapter, then, is a mix of narrative, critical commentary, literature review, data analysis and interpretation. Furthermore, rather than presenting research conclusions that are intended to be "convincing", I sought instead to explore issues and dilemmas, raise questions and present possibilities, thus acknowledging the tentative and emergent nature of my research 'findings'. As Winter (1996) suggests, these imprecise outcomes are more compatible with the role of the author as collaborator and participant, rather than observer and judge.

To guide this alternative report writing process, I found the criteria[2] proposed by Elliott (1994, p. 58) for reporting action research to be helpful. In modifying his criteria for my own specific purposes, I determined that my action research report should:

- provide a narrative account of the change process as it unfolds from a variety of perspectives: researcher, teachers, parents. This should tell a story in non-technical language and give the reader a sense of what it was like to be involved;

- portray the change process in context, highlighting those aspects which illuminate the experience of those involved;

- focus on problematic aspects of the change process;

- reflect upon these problematic aspects from different angles or points of view;

- reveal how understanding of the situation and the problems and issues evolved, in the light of new evidence;

- describe the curriculum and pedagogical strategies generated during the course of developing understanding of the situation;

- assess the consequences of curriculum and pedagogical strategies, both intended and unintended, for the quality of the change process; and

- describe, justify and critique the methods and procedures used to gather and analyse data.

Elliott observed that the construction of a report that satisfies such criteria is not an easy task. However, I felt that challenging traditional reporting norms with such a structure presented a more authentic picture of non-linear research practice and is truer to the spirit of action research.

The Examiners' Comments

While it was an interesting and challenging exercise to create an alternative way of reporting on this action research study, in the end, the thesis also has to be acceptable to its readers. In the first instance, these readers were the thesis examiners. Examiner 1, a researcher with a long-standing interest and reputation in action research, was generally supportive of the approach taken, and indicated that he understood and appreciated my desire for a better fit between the processes and intentions of action research and the form in which it is presented. However, as a reader, he also indicated that he had some difficulties with what was devised. He commented: "the literature reviews embedded in the

later chapters are interesting and were probably meaningful to the development of the author's thinking. They seem to me, however, to interrupt the cyclical flow of the project so that one wants to set them aside to follow the course of the story" (personal comm., 2003). His suggestion was to advise readers just prior to the 'cycle' chapters to skim the literature reviews first in order to maintain flow and continuity of the story. This suggestion was taken up during the thesis revision.

Examiner 2 was less sympathetic to the divergence from the traditional thesis format and, based on my reading of his examination comments overall, I am of the opinion that he did not fully understand the nature of action research nor what I was trying to achieve with the restructure. Rather than an unfolding of the research process and its attendant literature, he indicated, for example, that he would have liked to have had earlier mention of the literature that appeared in the cycle chapters. In other words, he preferred a traditional format with literature reviewed early in the thesis. He also indicated that I should have engaged in more preparatory reading in relation to a particular aspect of research 'content' – again, I believe he 'missed the point' about action research, in that the literature and the research process are intertwined rather than sequential. He also commented that the sections of overview about each cycle did not "build out" of the literature. However, these sections were never intended to do the latter; rather, the intention was to synthesise both the field work and the literature. Overall, though, he did comment positively upon the rigour and complexity of the research processes with which I was engaged and commended my level of scholarship.

Conclusion

Taking the comments of the examiners into account, perhaps in hindsight I could have paid more attention to writing as if I was a new reader of the thesis, rather than representing the work through the eyes of the writer-researcher. Perhaps this shift of focus would have led to a stronger sense of cohesion and continuity for these readers. On the other hand, the research processes with which I was engaged were rarely clear and coherent. To some extent, therefore, I am quite comfortable with having written a text that is somewhat disjointed and discontinuous, rather like the research itself. Action research is a dynamic, circular, and evolving research process. It does not fit easily into a format or writing process that is mechanistic and linear. In my thesis I have attempted to 'mess up' the structure and writing process so that it better represents the research methodology. While

not perfect, my attempt goes some way towards liberating action research from the strictures of conventional research reporting. I have done in the hope that my efforts will expand the possibilities for other action researchers to create their own interesting and adventurous ways of preparing and structuring their action research reports.

[1]*Troubling the Angels: Women Living with HIV/AIDS* is an example of such a text (Lather et al., 1997).
[2] These have been slightly modified to account for this specific context and study.

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